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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Report on the integration of global management of conference services

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, 54/244 of 23 December 1999, 57/292 of 20 December 2002 and 58/250 of 5 February 2004, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the attention of the General Assembly, the attached report, conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, on the integration of global management of conference services.

2. The Secretary-General takes note of the observations made in the report and is pleased with the report's assessment.

* A/59/50 and Corr.1.

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Report on the integration of global management of conference services

Summary

In December 2001, the General Assembly, in its resolution 56/253, requested the Secretary-General to ensure that conference services are managed in an integrated manner throughout all duty stations in the Organization. Additionally, in its resolution 58/250, the Assembly notes that the reform [of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management] will include a comprehensive study of the integrated global management, in accordance with section II.B, paragraph 8, of resolution 57/283 B, in consultation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and with the full participation of all duty stations in a collaborative and consultative process, with a view to reaching conclusions that are both practical and comprehensive, and requests the Secretary-General to keep the Assembly informed of the matter through the Committee on Conferences.

In response to these resolutions, the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management requested OIOS to provide consulting services and to help identify ways of achieving better integration of the management of conference services at its four duty stations — New York (United Nations Headquarters), Geneva (United Nations Office at Geneva), Vienna (United Nations Office at Vienna) and Nairobi (United Nations Office at Nairobi) — as well as identifying possible impediments towards that end.

The first challenge faced by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management concerns the differences among official documents regarding the locus of authority in the Department for policy-making and conference management. Some documents provide that such authority resides centrally in New York, while according to others, it is decentralized. This inconsistency has led to inconclusive debates and to a situation where the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management is responsible to the Secretary-General for the budgets and expenditures of all four duty stations, while in practice having little authority over how these funds are spent.

The second challenge arises from the first. Because official documents do not present a consistent picture regarding conference management policy, inconsistent management practices have developed in a number of areas across all four duty stations. These areas include budgets and expenditures, staffing, workload standards, information technology, meeting planning, documentation management, outsourcing, examinations and test management. A patchwork of policies and practices has resulted. To address this assortment of policies and procedures, OIOS proposes an alternative approach to the extremes of centralized or decentralized management.

The OIOS consultancy included conducting a number of workshops at all four duty stations to elicit suggestions that would serve as the basis for the integrated approach as requested by the Department. The results of these workshops form the basis of the OIOS proposals to the Department which are presented throughout the present report. OIOS developed the collaborative model, which is expressed through the nine Task Forces, in concert with all four duty stations, during visits to all four and in conformity with the mandate set out by the General Assembly.

In the proposed OIOS model, policies and practices are developed collaboratively by nine Task Forces, each of which involve all four duty stations. The Task Forces would be based on the following themes: harmonization of statistical indicators; meeting planning; human resources; outsourcing; information technology; budget and finance; documentation and publishing; client orientation; and examinations. The work of the Task Forces would be coordinated by a Focal Point in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in New York. All duty stations would be represented on each Task Force, with the Task Force chairs distributed among all four duty stations.

Each Task Force would prepare a chapter in the Department's new Manual of Policies and Procedures, to be ratified by the participants in the Department's Coordination Meeting in 2005. Since all four duty stations will have collaborated in preparing the Manual and will thus "own" its provisions, greater consistency and integration, a stronger corporate identity and more rational work-sharing practices to avoid peaks and troughs are likely to result.

The report makes a number of other proposals to further the introduction of the global concept. Most fundamental is the need for an attitude, or perception, in the four duty stations that they are part of a global network and, as such, must adopt a cooperative, collaborative approach where the needs and contributions of all duty stations are automatically and systematically taken into account. Another key recommendation is that the appointment of the head of conference services in each duty station would be made by the local Director-General in close consultation with the Under-Secretary-General, to consolidate the spirit of collaboration.

All of the proposals included in the present report have either emerged directly from the duty stations or have been extensively discussed with them. The management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management has endorsed these proposals and has already taken action to implement many of them.

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I. Introduction

1. The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management is responsible for managing conference services at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV). In December 2001, the General Assembly, in its resolution 56/253, requested the Secretary-General to ensure that conference services are managed in an integrated manner throughout all duty stations in the Organization. In turn, the Department requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to provide consulting services and to assist it in identifying ways of achieving better integration of conference services management at its four duty stations. Specifically, OIOS was asked to identify:

- Any concerns and issues in the management of personnel, meetings, documents, budgetary and financial measures and information technology systems that have arisen as a result of the current structure of responsibilities and authority for conference servicing across duty stations
- Potential benefits, including but not limited to synergies, savings and improved timeliness of delivery in managing the aforementioned areas that might accrue from reconsidering the existing structure
- Possible impediments to achieving the potential benefits identified.

2. The OIOS consultancy employed questionnaires, interviews and document analyses. It also conducted a number of workshops at all four duty stations to elicit suggestions that would serve as the foundation of the integrated approach, as requested by the Department. The results of these workshops form the basis of the OIOS proposals to the Department which are presented throughout the present report.

II. Defining the challenge

3. Various United Nations documents convey different messages about where authority lies in the conference services network. For example, resolution 56/253 supports a centralized approach, under which Headquarters sets policies and procedures, as does resolution 56/242, by which the General Assembly requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (the predecessor of the current Department for General Assembly and Conference Management) of the Secretariat is considered the appropriate executive authority to oversee, coordinate and enhance the global management and delivery of United Nations conference services (II.3).

4. Other documents, such as ST/SGB/2000/13 (sect. 7), call for dual reporting responsibilities, under which conference service operations in UNOG, UNOV and UNON report both to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in New York and to their local Directors-General, to the former for policy matters and to the latter for implementation of those policies.

5. As a result of these differences, the Under-Secretary-General in New York faces a major dilemma. While he is responsible for the budgets and the expenditures

in UNOG, UNON and UNOV relating to conference services, he has little control over how these Offices manage their finances.

6. There are also differences in the budgetary arrangements of the various duty stations. While 100 per cent of the Headquarters resources derive from the regular budget, in UNON this figure is only 50 per cent and in Vienna only 22 per cent. This has led to significant differences in the ways the duty stations operate, mainly because duty stations which need to generate their own revenue from clients provide different levels of service for their clients than do duty stations which have dedicated regular budget funding.

7. Under the current arrangements, there is little opportunity for harmonizing budgets across duty stations. Therefore, there is little incentive for Headquarters to discuss its budget submissions in detail with the other duty stations and such discussions do not occur. Similarly, there is limited feedback from Headquarters to the duty stations on their budget submissions. Budget formats and presentations vary widely. Moreover, uniform methods for charging for outsourced assistance have not been developed.

8. There are numerous other examples of inconsistencies among the four duty stations.[1] There has been, until recently, no uniform method for recovering costs when staff are loaned from one duty station to another; there was no clear system of staff exchanges to support conferences and major events; there is little coordination of outsourcing of translating and other services; there is room for improvement in the administration of examinations; there is little consistency in information technology capability and structure across duty stations; there was no centralized, uniform database accessible by all duty stations which shows meetings to be held and peaks and troughs in work across the year; there was no uniformity in the setting of page limits, waivers or the use of the slotting system; there is no uniformity in definitions, referencing, terminology, formatting or spelling across duty stations. Perhaps most importantly, there has not always been consistency in statistical indicators and workload standards for pages, page impressions, workdays, workyears, and assignment days.

9. OIOS found that the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management staff at Headquarters, UNOG, UNON and UNOV recognized these inconsistencies, which they raised in the numerous meetings held by OIOS with them and with clients in all four duty stations.

III. Dealing with the challenge

A. Approach

10. To deal with these inconsistencies, OIOS proposes a third approach in which, instead of being set in either a centralized or decentralized way, policies and practices are developed collaboratively by all four duty stations.

11. A similar collaborative, or partnership, approach can be found in the private sector. In many global companies, partners in each country's firm collaborate to set the policies and procedures of the firm worldwide.

12. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management has already taken a number of steps towards achieving such a collaborative approach. Since 2000, it has been holding a series of coordination meetings attended by all duty stations. It has also begun a number of joint activities, such as the Information and Communications Technology Board and the Task Force on Performance Measurement and Workload Standards (not one of the Task Forces proposed in the present report). All duty stations are represented in these bodies.

B. Towards a Cooperative Global Strategy

13. The present section contains an outline of what OIOS believes to be a realistic new global management strategy (the "Cooperative Global Strategy") for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The strategy is founded on the concept of cooperation and is expressed in a number of measures the Department is recommended to take in this calendar year. These recommendations were presented to the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management at the conclusion of the consultancy and were adopted by the Department. A Focal Point was appointed in New York and task forces were launched. Task force reports must be submitted prior to the July coordination meeting. In addition, a number of other recommendations relating to improved coordination and communication have been implemented by the Department.

14. The features of the Department's Cooperative Global Strategy are:

- Moving to a mutually consultative and cooperative culture in which the views and contributions of all duty stations are valued and systematically sought and where information is freely shared
- Nominating a Focal Point within the office of the Under-Secretary-General to "drive" the cooperative global strategy and act as a bridge between Headquarters and the other duty stations
- Establishing a series of broad-based cross-duty station Task Forces (in conjunction with discipline-based Working Groups) to recommend practical and realistic policies and procedures to further the integration of global management throughout the Secretariat
- Considering and adopting those recommended policies and procedures at the next two Department Coordination Meetings
- Encouraging participation by the Directors-General from all duty stations and/or their representatives in the Coordination Meetings
- Requesting the approval by the Coordination Meetings of a fixed text, arising from the recommendations, which will be submitted to the Under-Secretary-General for final authorization
- Using the fixed text as the nucleus of a new Manual of Departmental Policies and Procedures
- Providing additional resources for the Department Executive Office to enable it to monitor budgets and expenditure reports

- Implementing a series of staff exchanges across duty stations, within a defined policy and operational framework, with additional resources to be secured from extrabudgetary sources, if possible
- Issuing a circular by the Under-Secretary-General to all conference servicing staff in the four duty stations, affirming the establishment of an explicit strategy to support and further the integration of global management (the "Cooperative Global Strategy")
- Requesting the Under-Secretary-General to approve the budget for each duty station
- Considering the harmonization of the structures of all duty stations, if necessary, in consultation with the Department of Management
- Considering changing the names of units to enhance consistency across all duty stations
- Commissioning a study of the capacity of each duty station to carry out its required duties
- Considering, in consultation with the Department of Management, measures to standardize the budgetary sources of all duty stations, principally to bring UNON in line with the other duty stations by considerably increasing the proportion of its budget that it receives from the regular budget, in order to reduce the burden it faces of having to generate income in competition with lower-priced rivals
- Retaining the existing reporting lines of heads of Conference Services to their local Directors-General
- Enhancing the close consultation between the local Directors-General and the Under-Secretary-General on the selection of the head of conference services in each duty station
- Building-in compliance with the Manual's provisions by requiring staff to report on progress towards achieving the cooperation goals
- Considering changing the appropriate Secretary-General's Bulletins to incorporate proposals contained in the present section relevant to budget, personnel, structure and nomenclature.

C. Task Forces

15. OIOS recommended that the Task Forces be organized as part of a comprehensive global management strategy to be implemented by the Department. The lesson learned from the 2003 Coordination Meeting was that a Focal Point needed to be appointed to "drive" the entire integration strategy forward and, as part of that function, to coordinate the work of the Task Forces. OIOS accordingly included the idea of the Focal Point in the proposed global management strategy, which was accepted and implemented by the Department.

16. At one of the workshops conducted by OIOS in Nairobi in November 2003, the Task Force idea was developed further. The workshop participants decided to break the components of global management into five areas, which included policies,

priorities and reports. They also developed a "spectrum of sharing of authority" across all four duty stations. The spectrum ranged from one extreme, where Headquarters makes all the decisions, to the other extreme, where each of the duty stations assumes all of the responsibility for the development of policies and procedures for that duty station. The same approach was used at UNOG and UNOV and validated at a workshop in New York.

17. The main message of these exercises and indeed of all the missions OIOS undertook to the offices away from Headquarters was that staff of the non-New York duty stations wanted to be included in all aspects of the Department's work: decision-making; policy-making; information-sharing; and the development of procedures.

18. The perceived benefits of the Task Forces were the following:

- They allowed all four duty stations to develop policies and procedures jointly
- At the same time, they allowed the duty stations to conduct day-to-day operations independently
- They would enable the creation of policies and procedures that would be more likely to be sustained since all duty stations would "own" the policies and procedures they had developed
- They would, accordingly, preserve and raise staff morale
- They would develop realistic solutions that would reflect the actual circumstances in all the duty stations.

19. With the assistance of OIOS, reasonably detailed terms of reference, which addressed issues of material interest to staff and essentially reflected their ideas, were developed for each Task Force.

20. OIOS further proposed that each Task Force prepare a report, including recommendations for presentation at the 2004 Coordination Meeting.

21. The Task Force approach was supported by all four duty stations and constitutes the main feature of the present report. Staff and management at Headquarters suggested that the Task Forces be broad-based and that their work be assisted by discipline-based working groups. A set of guiding principles governing the operation of the Task Forces was developed during the consultancy. These principles incorporate the suggestions made by all parties. These principles, a list of Task Forces and their terms of reference are set forth below.

D. Guiding principles of the Task Forces

22. In the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the proposed Task Forces should operate according to the following guiding principles:

- Task Forces should be chaired by staff from different duty stations; the duty station with the greatest need, not the greatest expertise, should chair to help ensure that the work of the Task Force is actually accomplished
- A Headquarters Focal Point should be appointed to monitor progress and report to the Departmental Management Group and all duty stations

- Task Forces should submit reports to the Coordination Meeting in July with recommended policies and procedures for their area of concentration
- Concrete terms of reference and outputs should be defined for each Task Force by the Focal Point
- All duty stations should be required to participate actively in all Task Forces
- Each Task Force should decide whether to include those regional commissions within its purview that maintain their own conference services; however, to ensure that regional commissions are not totally excluded, each Task Force chair should send a copy of the Task Force report to the five regional commissions prior to the July Coordination Meeting
- Task Force decisions should be reached by consensus
- Since Task Forces discuss policy issues, they do not need to be staffed by substantive experts. Technical Task Forces must include managers, who will consult with substantive experts on an as-needed basis
- Each Task Force should decide on its scope and method of work and on the outputs which can be delivered for the 2004 Coordination Meeting
- Certain matters, such as the composition of the Headquarters Calendar of Meetings cannot be decided by Task Forces. All duty stations should nevertheless be informed about these matters and consulted to determine how they will be affected
- Each Task Force member has the obligation to consult his/her local colleagues to determine their views and concerns.

23. The foregoing principles were extensively discussed by Departmental staff in all four duty stations. Indeed, many of the principles were proposed by the staff themselves.

E. List of Task Forces

24. The list of Task Forces is as follows:

(a) Task Force on Harmonization of Statistical Indicators, to be chaired by UNON;

(b) Meeting and Planning Task Force, to be chaired by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management;

(c) Human Resources Task Force, to be chaired by UNOV;

(d) Task Force on Contractual Services, to be chaired by UNOG;

(e) Information Technology Policy Task Force, to be chaired by UNOV;

(f) Budget and Finance Task Force, to be chaired by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management;

(g) Documentation and Publishing Task Force, to be chaired by UNOG;

(h) Task Force on Client Orientation, to be chaired by UNON;

(i) Task Force on Examinations, chair to be determined.

25. OIOS recommended that five of the Task Forces — letters (a), (c), (d), (f) and (h) — which deal with the more urgent issues, should be formed in time to prepare a report for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management Coordination Meeting in July 2004, as outlined above. The remaining Task Forces should set their priorities and the Chair should prepare a report to the Coordination Meeting, if possible. The top priority for all Task Forces is to share information and recommend policies.

26. Although OIOS does not envisage that the work of existing groups[2] would be duplicated by the work of the proposed Task Forces, it will be the responsibility of the Focal Point to ensure that there is no duplication. The ultimate aim is to develop a Department for General Assembly and Conference Management Manual of Policies and Procedures and all groups will be contributing to achieve that goal.

27. Duty station representatives on the Task Forces should be at a level senior enough to speak authoritatively on behalf of their duty stations. Practicability should be the key to those representatives' recommendations.

IV. Related implementation issues

A. Staffing capacity study

28. A capacity study of the strengths available in each duty station in each area of specialization would greatly facilitate staff exchanges and staff mobility. The study should assess staffing week by week over a two-year period. It should also provide a blueprint for future reports, which could be completed weekly by all duty stations. The capacity study should be completed only after the work of the Task Force on Harmonization of Statistical Indicators is carried out.

29. The terms of reference for the capacity study should include the following:

- Developing an agreed-upon formula for determining permanent capacity for the various functions of the Department, including, but not limited to, (i) interpretation, (ii) translation, (iii) text processing and (iv) editing
- Applying the formula at all duty stations for each function to determine real permanent capacity
- Developing proposals for quantifying capacity for temporary staff.

30. The Central Planning and Coordination Service of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management could conduct the capacity study with assistance from consultants, if necessary. Those carrying out the capacity study should note that the formulas developed could be adjusted once the results of the Task Force on the Performance Measurement Study — Review of Workload Standards have been obtained.

B. Role of the Focal Point

31. The role of the Focal Point is key to ensuring that the work of the Task Forces is substantial and lasting. There is a risk that without the Focal Point the Task Force

programme will not be properly initiated, jeopardizing the global integration programme and the Department's compliance with the General Assembly's mandate.

32. The Focal Point would, inter alia:

- Drive the Department's global cooperation and integration programme
- Coordinate the work of the Task Forces
- Act when required as the channel between Headquarters and the duty stations
- Prepare, on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General, a circular for Department for General Assembly and Conference Management staff outlining the Cooperative Global Strategy
- Prepare the agenda for the Coordination Meeting
- Coordinate the presentation of the Task Force recommendations to the Coordination Meeting
- Ensure that the results of the Coordination Meeting are presented to the Under-Secretary-General
- Ensure that the approved text forms part of the Manual of Policies and Procedures
- Finalize the preparation of the Manual
- Prepare and implement a programme of staff exchanges
- Support the duty stations in sensitizing clients to the need for better scheduling of meetings in the interests of good global management
- Assist the Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Office in negotiations with the Department of Management regarding the budgetary and administrative structure of the duty stations, the budgets presented by the duty stations and the financial reports of the duty stations
- Assist the Executive Office in monitoring the financial reports of the duty stations
- Support the Executive Office in commissioning a capacity study of the duty stations
- Help to prepare new Secretary-General's Bulletins, as appropriate
- Explore the use of videoconferencing software for communication among duty stations
- Prepare a report on the global integration programme for the General Assembly.

C. Coordination Meeting

33. Annual Coordination Meetings among the four duty stations have been held since 2000 as part of the reform process undertaken by the Secretary-General. The meetings have discussed common approaches and harmonization of policies across duty stations. The upcoming fifth Coordination Meeting will be the first to deal with a formalized global management approach to conference servicing. Based on staff

suggestions and the strong endorsement of OIOS, this year's Coordination Meeting has been extended to three days. Any new strategy or approach, such as the Cooperative Global Strategy, needs to be properly analysed and established through discussion and debate. Discussion of this strategy requires participation by staff and every effort should be made to encourage such participation. It would also be highly desirable for the Directors-General to attend. If this is not possible, they should, ideally, send representatives. In this regard, OIOS believes that an annual meeting of the Under-Secretary-General and the Directors-General would enhance coordination and communication.

D. Staff exchanges

34. A number of staff in all duty stations raised the possibility of introducing a system of staff exchanges. There was particular receptivity to this concept among staff in offices away from Headquarters, who wanted Headquarters staff to spend some time — a month or more — in their offices. Although difficult to quantify, these exchanges would result in real benefits. For example, understanding of one another's constraints and practices would greatly increase and the contacts would facilitate future interaction. However, all staff discussing this issue acknowledged that this would be a costly exercise. The possibility of securing funding from clients for this purpose was raised and could be further explored by the Focal Point of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

E. Selection and appointment of the Chief of Conference Services in each duty station

35. Neither the task force mechanism nor the Focal Point can address the issue of selecting and appointing the head of Conference Services in each duty station. This senior official must work successfully with the relevant Director-General on a daily basis. His/her contractual relationship is, and should remain, with the Director-General. His/her Performance Appraisal System (PAS) performance record is, and should always be, signed by the Director-General. Therefore, the Director-General must play a key role in appointing him or her.

36. At the same time, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management in New York is answerable to the Assembly for the consequences of the actions taken by the heads of Conference Services in duty stations away from Headquarters. Moreover, in keeping with the new global approach and spirit, it is highly desirable for the decision on the appointment of the head of Conference Services not to be made exclusively by the local Director-General.

37. OIOS believes that in the interests of harmonization and integration of conference services worldwide, as required by the General Assembly, it would be desirable for the Under-Secretary-General to approve the appointment of the head of conference services in the offices away from home, although the head would be accountable to the local Director-General. Accordingly, OIOS considers that the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management should be consulted closely and actively before the head of conference services in duty stations outside New York is appointed.

38. One possible way to effect this consultation would be to establish a selection panel. The panel would include the local Director-General, a representative of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and possible selected clients. The decision should be unanimous.

F. Under-Secretary-General/Director-General relationship

39. The majority of the recommendations in the present report relate to operational issues. However, the recommendations are not likely to be implemented successfully and the General Assembly's clear mandate is not likely to be satisfied without a firm and consultative relationship between the Under-Secretary-General and the Directors-General.

40. To ensure the strength of this relationship, the following measures are recommended. They are in addition to the measures set out in paragraphs 35 to 38 above.

- The Under-Secretary-General and the Directors-General should seek to meet together once a year, if possible during the Coordination Meeting and/or during the General Assembly, during discussions on Directors-Generals' budgets. If this is not possible, the Under-Secretary-General should meet each Director-General once a year at the minimum
- It would be desirable for the Directors-General to attend the Coordination Meeting. Failing this, the Directors-General should send representation
- The Directors-General or their designated representative(s) should play a key role in the discussion of the policies and procedures which will form the basis of the Manual
- Minutes of all regular senior staff meetings in all duty stations should be sent to all duty stations, as Directors-General may wish to examine the possibility of nominating their own Focal Point to liase with the Focal Point in New York.

G. Building-in compliance

41. OIOS found during its missions that staff in offices away from Headquarters were extremely interested in participating in a cooperative approach to the management of conference services. They wanted to play a prominent role in drawing up the manual and to be consulted and communicate more frequently and meaningfully with each other and with Headquarters.

42. It would be useful to build-in some mechanisms for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Manual, to make certain that there is no retreat from the spirit of cooperation which the Department has introduced. Changing the culture of an organization is never easy or straightforward and every tool possible should be brought to bear.

43. Some of these tools, or incentives, could include:

- Setting of specific targets for each Task Force chair, and a requirement to report to the Under-Secretary-General if those targets are not achieved

- Placing in the Under-Secretary-General's compact a requirement to comply with indicators, such as annual meetings with Directors-General, quarterly communications with Directors-General, appointment of the Focal Point, circulation of a statement on the new cooperative approach, setting up of a Department-wide newsletter and distribution to offices away from Headquarters of the minutes of the weekly Senior Management Group meetings in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

- Establishing a requirement in the Manual that Directors should report quarterly to the Under-Secretary-General on matters relating to integration and the development in the Manual of a template for such reports

- Placing in the job description of senior staff in all duty stations a requirement to demonstrate regular substantive communication with other duty stations and use by superiors of this criterion as a tool when the PAS performance record is prepared

- Rewarding the willingness of staff to relocate.

44. As it has already pointed out, a major drawback of the current system is that the Under-Secretary-General is responsible to the Secretary-General for the budgets of all the duty stations, even though he has no authority over how they spend their funds. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/283 B, stresses that the Department is responsible for the implementation of policy, the formulation of standards and guidelines, overseeing and coordinating United Nations conference services and the overall management of resources under the relevant budget section, while the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi remain responsible and accountable for day-to-day operational activities. In fact, some duty stations have exceeded their budgets, in at least one case by as much as $17 million as a result of an increase in the use of temporary assistance to service unplanned meetings whose costs were not absorbed by the client.

45. OIOS has proposed a three-pronged strategy which could address this situation and ensure compliance with the limits of the budgets.

46. The first part of the strategy would be for the Under-Secretary-General to circulate an official statement that a duty station must receive prior approval from the Under-Secretary-General for major additional expenditures. Currently, additions to the Calendar of Conferences must be paid for by the organization requesting the additional meeting and full-cost recovery may alleviate overexpenditures in the future. Such a rule would help the duty stations in their negotiations with clients seeking additional meetings.

47. The second part of the strategy would be for the Under-Secretary-General to require duty stations to submit quarterly expenditure reports to the Executive Office at Headquarters, with clear comments highlighting any unusual or untoward developments, such as numerous unexpected meetings. If the Department's Executive Office at Headquarters acquires its extra personnel resources, these staff could be made responsible for monitoring expenditure patterns by the duty stations. The Under-Secretary-General should require the Executive Office to present these data to the Departmental Management Group on a quarterly basis, together with an analysis of the issues and recommendations for improvement.

48. The third part of the strategy would be for the Task Force on Client Orientation to prepare a standard statement for clients emphasizing the new policy set by Headquarters and stating that clients are accordingly requested to ensure that all meetings are strictly necessary.

49. This combination of incentives and other measures should go a considerable way towards ensuring compliance by all duty stations, including New York.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

50. The General Assembly set a very clear mandate for the Department in 2000. Member States did not want to be subject to different policies and practices in different duty stations and accordingly sought greater integration of management in conference services throughout the entire global network. The present report has sought to show that there are many other potential benefits to improving the integration of global management of conference services.

51. OIOS delineated the key components for Departmental consideration and action. The main OIOS proposal is that the Department establish an explicit Cooperative Global Strategy, in which all duty stations participate in setting policies and procedures, which are, with the Under-Secretary-General's approval, codified into a Manual of Policies and Procedures. These steps constitute the centrepiece of the present report.

52. The report makes a number of other proposals to further the introduction of the global concept. Most fundamental is the need for an attitude, or perception, in the four duty stations that they are part of a global network and, as such, have to adopt a cooperative, collaborative approach where the needs and contributions of all duty stations are automatically and systematically taken into account. All of the proposals included in the present report have either emerged directly from the duty stations or have been extensively discussed with them.

53. As mentioned previously, the Department has already determined which steps it wishes to take and is in the process of implementing them.

Recommendation 1

54. **OIOS recommends that the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management formulate and actively promote a cooperative and consultative culture, in which all duty stations' views and contributions are valued and systematically sought and where all information is freely shared (MC/04/001/001).**

Recommendation 2

55. **The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should establish nine cross-duty station Task Forces on: Harmonization of Statistical Indicators; Meeting and Planning; Human Resources; Contractual Services; Information Technology Policy; Budget and Finance; Documentation and Publishing; Client Orientation; and Examinations. The Department should also designate a focal point at Headquarters to coordinate the work of the Task Forces. The Task Forces should make recommendations to the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management**

concerning policies and procedures for each of their respective areas. The recommendations should be considered at the July 2004 Coordination Meeting and codified in a Manual of Policies and Procedures (MC/04/001/002).

Recommendation 3

56. **The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should promulgate mandatory reporting requirements for staff to ensure compliance with the Manual of Policies and Procedures (MC/04/001/003).**

Recommendation 4

57. **The Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should harmonize the administrative and budgetary structures of the conference servicing components at all four duty stations (MC/04/001/004).**

Recommendation 5

58. **The appropriate Directors-General should consult actively with the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management on senior staff appointments in the four duty stations. In addition, the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should consider the feasibility of establishing a system of staff exchanges among duty stations (MC/04/001/005).**

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] These issues are currently being addressed by the Task Forces referred to in paragraph 13.

[2] Existing groups include: the Information and Communications Technology Board; the Task Force on Ways and Means to achieve Compliance with Relevant Guidelines on Page Limits; and the Task Force on the Performance Measurement Study — Review of Workload Standards.